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UNDERSTANDING A TRADITION: ANALYSIS OF THE CHARRO ATTIRE AS A WORK OF ART

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Arturo Bugarín Correa

School of Visual and Performing Arts

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UNDERSTANDING A TRADITION; ANALYSIS OF
THE CHARRO ATTIRE AS A
WORK OF ART

PREPARED BY:

_____

Arturo Bugarín Correa

APROVED BY:

_____

Michael A. Coronel

HONORS
ADVISOR:

_____

Michael A. Coronel

HONORS DIRECTOR:

_____

Loree Crow

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PROJECT COMMITTEE ON:

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"Que Lindo Es Mi Dios,

Cuando Se Viste De *Charro*"

Abstract

This thesis examines the development, creation and characteristics of the *charro* suit as a work of art, and its use as a social and class distinguisher in Mexico since the seventeen-century. Focusing on aesthetics, who uses it and when, its history, what influences affected it, and the production of the suit were analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of how the suit developed and evolved into the current design used. Particular attention was given to one of the most distinguishable components of the suit, the fretted patterns known as *grecas*. They were analyzed by separating the individual design aspects that create it, and then, trying to locate if possible, their origin in indigenous, colonial and foreign design.

A glance at the history of the attire presented a social equalization between *hacendados* and *peónes* brought by changing laws and customs, most specifically the 1633 royal decree reinforcing King Felipe II's 1568 and 1570 decrees prohibiting natives to ride horses, and the widespread use of the same by the seventeenth century. The thesis explored how those legal prohibitions led to the use of a visual identifier, the *charro* suit, to distinguish between *hacendados* and *peónes* and how this suit evolved over time.

This has brought a new perspective to a cultural icon, and the visual, yet little known relationship, between *hacendados* and their *peónes*, and how the attempt to distinguish between both groups might have in fact united them even more.

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Introduction

When social organization within a culture became more complex, groups were created within the society, and in order to maintain groups separated, the members of those groups needed ways of distinguishing themselves from those members of the society who belonged to other groups. This social stratification within a culture was, and is, reinforced by visual identifiers and these visual identifiers take different forms, such as clothing, jewelry, makeup or the ownership of property. The production of these items in many instances has become a well-defined craft, and the objects themselves have become works of art, jewelry being a good example of this, and the use of such items has become a tradition of the cultures in which they were created and used. Through their use, members of a culture can find continuity with the past, and in some instances cultural identity, when such objects become national symbols.

Traditions, as defined by Erick Hobsbawm in his book, *The Invention of Tradition*, are "a set of practices…which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition…" (Hobsbawm 10). These identifiers, turned traditions, tend to be overlooked not just by other members of the society that created them but, more importantly, by those who partake in, and promote the tradition itself. Constant use, normality, and the fact the some of these traditions are so engrained in a culture, prevents people from questioning why such objects are used and why they even became a tradition on the first place; for example, few of us in our society ever wonder why earrings are used, were they came from, etc. Mexican society is no stranger to such traditions, and it also does not always question them. One of them not only separates one of its

groups from the others but, it also serves as a cultural icon for Mexico, not just within the country but internationally as well. The *charro* suit, *traje charro* in Spanish, has served this purpose in Mexico, beginning in the seventeen century, and like many other traditions it is one surrounded by a long history, full of facts and legends, which seems to be unknown to most Mexicans. Growing in a *charro* family, one can become so accustomed to seeing this type of suit, this manner of dressing, that one does not wonder on how it became to be and how it turned into the cultural icon that it is. *Charro*s, those who wear the suit, provided some information regarding the history, and why *charro* suits are the tradition they are, but it is not a concrete history. It seemed as if the cultural icon of a nation, and one that provides so much pride to its wearers, was not fully understood by those who wear it.

Researching, information was found regarding the cultural significance of the *charro* suit and some of its history, but for the most part, the information seemed to be focused on its importance as a cultural icon rather than how it came to be and why. Such an iconic tradition deserves to be understood better, and since the *charro* suit is produced in an artisanal way and has a high visual significance, which serves a purpose, the suit can be considered a work of art, and thus it is important to analyze it as such. First it is important to describe the aesthetics, describe what *charro* suits are. As noted by José Lameiras in his presentation *Ser y Vestir*, to completely understand a manner of dressing one must include the different elements and accessories that accompany it such as footwear, hair style, jewelry, tattoos, makeup, etc. (Diego Fernández 213). The *charro* suit is no different, and it is equally important to know who uses it and when. A view of its history will provide more information on why it is used the way it is, how this came to be, how it has evolved over time, and what influences affect it. To conclude, and to better understand a work of art, one must understand how it is produced and who produces it. Particular

attention was given to one of the most distinguishable components of the suit, the fretted patterns, known as *grecas*, for they seem to be the least understood aspect of the suit, and it is important to know why they are used. By viewing the *charro* suit as a work of art, a different perspective can be given to a cultural symbol that we all seem to know, but that few truly understand; a symbol that is a piece of art, but that is not always viewed as such.

The *Charro* Suit

Charro suits are perhaps the most recognizable way of dressing associated with Mexican culture, even though this way of dressing is not widely used within Mexico. It consists of several garments and is most easily recognized by its use of wide hats, or *sombreros*, which can also be seen used by mariachi groups even in the United States. The suit, at its simplest, consists of a wide brimmed hat, tight fitting trousers adorned or unadorned with leather or metal, a shirt, vest, jacket, tie and boots. There are five variations to the suit each of which evolved from the particular situation in which each is used, and all of which vary in their amount of intricacy, work to produce them, materials and price. The way the suit looks, and how it is worn, is regulated by the *Federación Nacional de Charro*s, a group based in Mexico City, who serves as the authority on all things *charro*. General rules apply to all the variations of the suit, such as that the wearer should always carry a revolver, a practice not always followed for safety reasons, a hat must be worn at all times, and that all the different parts of the suit should match in color and material with each other. Spurs, saddles, holster, gloves, called *manillas,* and chaps also complement the suit but since they are not used in all the variations of the suit they will not be included in the analysis. The absence of one of them does not affect the overall appearance of the suit. An exception will be made with the *faja*, a girdle, which although not used in all the versions of the suit, it has to be worn in the *gran gala* and *etiqueta* variations and alters the way they look. Two of the variations show the two extremes of the attire, from its simplest and least

elaborate version, known as *faena*, to the most intricate and ornate version, known as *etiqueta*. The differences don't necessarily impact the overall view of the suit for they relate mostly to the material used and the intricacy of the patterns (for example, when the suit uses suede patterns over suede, rather than suede patterns over cloth, known as *cachiruleado*). More information regarding the variations can be found in the manual of the *Federación Nacional de Charros*. These are the variations:

Faena - The simplest of the variations to the suit is the one used during a *charreada*, or competition (more on *charreadas* page 31). It is a more functional suit, for it tends to lack anything that is unnecessary for the competition, such as metal adornments or very elaborate designs. A patch of leather can be sown in the back area of the trousers for added protection and the hat is usually made of palm or felt and, as the rest of the suit, it has few designs. It comes in brown, grey, or fawn tonalities.

Media Gala - More adorned and of better quality than the *faena* variation, but also used in competitions, this variation has more designs, a vest and a jacket with leather buttons. The felt hat can have two *chapetas* (small adornments at the base of the hat's crown), which can be made of silver and the trousers have fretted patens on the sides made of *gamuza.* Belts can be decorated with *pita*, a material obtained from plants such as agave. The tie can have some sewed design decoration as well.

Gala - Variation used on horseback but not in competitions usually made in grey, dark blue or black. The hat is *galoneada* (adorned in gold or silver tread wrapped in silk string) and the trousers have silver buttons on the sides rather than suede patterns.

Gran gala - Similar to *gala* but made with higher quality materials such as silk and silver; this variation uses girdle, matching in color the tie, around the waist.

Etiqueta- Used at night or during ceremonies, this variation is used in black and on foot; although it can be used on horseback during weddings and funerals. It is the most ornate of the five and tends to have only gold and silver, which also makes it the most expensive. The belt's buckle, the jacket's buttons and the trousers' adornments are made of silver. The hat is black, white or grey and *galoneada,* while the tie and girdle are white.

Individual components

All of the variations are conformed of the following garments:

Hat (sometimes known as Sombrero San Luis) - Usually made of palm straw or felt, *charro* hats are perhaps the most recognizable aspect of the suit. They have wide brims (48cm to 50cm wide for smaller hats and 55cm to 58cm wide for larger ones). The brim, unlike those of cowboy hats, is flat on all sides but the back, where it curves to an almost 90 degree angle. This shape serves two functional purposes, it diminishes the force of an impact on the wearer's head during a fall, and it protects from the sun and rain. The *copa* (crown) tends to be 17cm to 22cm tall, depending on the size of the brim, and has four indentations known as *pedradas* at the top, which also serve as protection during a fall. Both, the edge of the brim, and the base of the *copa* are adorned with patterns and designs made of materials such as leather, rope or gold and silver string and in some cases the edge of the brim can go unadorned. The base of the *copa* can also be adorned with *chapetas* made of horn, bone, or suede and in some instances a rope like material. Due to the weight of the hats, and to keep them from falling, they have two small strings located next to the ears were a chin strap made of leather can be attached; this strap is worn under the bottom lip rather than the chin.

Figure 1 *Charro* hat, known as sombrero.

Figure 2 Detail of hat's leather design.

Charro hats, depending on the material used, can be one of the most expensive individual aspects of the attire and, unlike the hats sold to tourists as souvenirs, which can cost as little as ten US dollars, *charro* hats can cost hundreds of US dollars. They can be custom made, or bought already made since they come in standard sizes. Hats are perhaps the aspect of the *charro* suit that has the most Spanish influence for they seem to have originated from the hats used by Spanish *picadores,* which were adapted to a Mexican

life style (Rincon Gallardo 7). *Picadores* (see figure 3), are men who participate, on horseback, during bullfights, were they use a small-brim hat which, as it became used in farms and ranches in Mexico, became wider, heavier, and when used in ceremonies, much more elaborated.

Figure 3 Spanish *picador*; a strong influence on the *charro* suit.

Shirt - Shirts used with the *charro* suit are in the *pachuqueña* style, although a normal shirt can be used, thought it must be covered by the jacket. Modern *charro* shirts are very similar to those used by the military and it is likely that military shirts served as an influence to *pachuqueña* shirts. They have low, flat necks 2 to 3 cm tall, with two gaps where the tie can be attached too, and a button right below the two gaps closes the neck and, much like regular dressing shirts, buttons in the front close the shirt. However unlike regular shirts, *charro*

Figure 4 *Charro* shirt detail.

shirt's buttons, called *huesitos*, are not round but ratter football-shaped, and can be made of horn, bone or rolled suede, and are about 2.5 cm long. On the sleeves there are two to four *mancuernas* (non-functional cufflinks) of the same material as the *huesitos*, and are only adornments. There are also two front pockets some of which also are not functional and, unlike the rest of the buttons in the shirt, the pockets have a small strip of cloth that comes from the inside of the pocket, and attaches to a fixed button (see figure 4). Besides the *mancuernas,* another other adornment consists of a pattern, created by the overlap of two sections of cloth, and which can be left as a visible sewing, or can be lined by a small string, similar to a miniature rope, which follows the edge of the sewing. This pattern on the front creates two arcs over the pockets then flanks the buttons of the shirt and on the back it creates the shape of a horseshoe, (see figure 5). In some shirts the top layer of the shirt can be made of a different material or color, which makes this pattern more noticeable.

Figure 5 Detail of pattern on *charro* shirt.

Charro shirts can, and for the most part are, bought at stores specializing in *charro* items rather than be custom made. Like regular shirts they come in standard sizes and tend to be one of the cheapest parts of the *charro* suit costing a few hundred Mexican pesos or twenty USD.

Moño - *Charro* ties, or *moños*, consist of a strip of silk, chamois, or soft cloth about 60cm long folded into a butterfly-like shape. Ties have two *huesitos*, joined by string to each other, on the back for attachment to the shirt. *Moños* do not have a practical purpose but are rather a visual additive, which usually contrasts in color with the jacket, much like regular tie stands out from a suit. Holding the *huesitos'* strip is a ring which is one of the most elegant pieces, and an intricate aspect of the entire suit, but is not noticeable due to its small size, (see figure 6). Some *moños* can be plain with no designs on them and others can have small patterns sown into the front in silk string. They come in colors such as white, red, green, blue, and brown and like shirts, ties are also bought at stores and thend to be inexpensive.

Figure 6 *Moños*, left, and holder ring, right. This intricate ring measures less than one in long.

A short essay by Priest Roberto Urzúa Orozco, titled *El Camino Real de Colima,* describes the way wealthy travelers dressed around the XIX century; "the use of neck less

shirts was common…trousers of corduroy (known as *pana*)…jacket of the same material…silk tie around the neck, boots of leather…and saddle in silver embroidery" he mentions that the horses of the wealthy "bit on silver, wear silver, and carried silver" (Diego Fernández 229). This description shows that ties had been used by the wealthy since the 1800s, perhaps to keep dust from the neck or simply for show, and, whether on purpose or not, the *charro* suit adopted this, where they seem to serve only the latter purpose. By analyzing photographs and films from the last century we see that the tie was wrapped around the neck and tied at the front, rather than attached to the neck of the shirt, which tells us that the butterfly tie is a rather recent introduction.

Jacket - *Charro* jackets come in three types, *grequeada*, cloth with suede designs and leather buttons in the front, *cachirruleada,* or *cahirol,* suede with suede designs and leather or metal buttons, and gala, cloth with suede designs and silver buttons. They tend to have *greca* around the wrists, on the shoulders and on the back, all of which are highly elaborate and can cover most of the jacket, (see figure 7). Although similar to a regular suit they only have two buttons, one on each side of the front, which interlock to close the jacket. To facilitate horse ridding, jackets do

Figure 7 *Charro* jacket.

not go below the waist and the sleeves tend to be a few centimeters shorter than the shirt. They seem to have evolved from Spanish military jackets; this can be seen in the shape of the jacket and the locations of the embroidery on military jackets, which translated into suede patterns of the *charro* jacket.

Jackets, vest and trousers are custom made and can only fit correctly the person for whom they were made. All together they can cost anywhere from two to fifty thousand pesos (200 to 5,000 USD).

Figure 8 *Charro* jacket ca. 1900.

Trousers - *Charro* trousers, like jackets, come in three types, *grequeado, cachiruleado,* or *gala*. They are very close fitting to facilitate horse riding, so much in fact that leaning over can be difficult. They are wider at the ankle, which permits the wearer to cover the top section of the boots. There are no buttons in the front but rather a hook and, like

regular pants, they have a zipper, which must be a recent addition. The suede patterns, about ten centimeters wide, are placed at the sides and cover the trousers from the ankle to the waist, and in instances the front and back of the waist creating a belt-like design, (see figure 8). When made for *gala*, *gran gala*, or *etiqueta* the suede patterns are replaced by metal *chapetas*, or linked buttons, which are made of nickel covered in silver, (see figure 9).

Figure 9 Detail of trousers, left, and of *chapetas*, right.

Belts - At their simplest, belts consist of a strip of leather about 7cm thick and about 60cm long, with no patterns or designs on them. For more elaborated suits they are covered in fretted patterns made of *pita* or *galoneados* in silver string. The buckle can have initials, branding irons, or any chosen design made of the same material as the rest of the patterns. Price range can go anywhere from 250 to 15,000 Mexican pesos (25 to

1,500 USD) when made in pita, to more than 20,000 pesos (2,000 USD) when in silver, making them, relative to their size, some of the most expensive parts of the suit.

Figure 10 *Charro* belts. They can be plain or adorned with initials and branding irons.

***Botines* (boots)** - Unlike boots used in northern Mexico, *botines* have round fronts and tend to be shorter in height, stopping right above the ankle, with a heel about 5cm tall. A round front stops the boot from getting stuck in the stirrup in case the wearer falls from the horse, and the heel serves as a "hook" for the stirrup. When wearing them as part of the *charro* suit they need to be made in one color, although they can also be made in two colors, known as *duvalines*, after a type of tri-color Mexican candy. However wearing them as such is against regulations when wearing a *charro* suit. *Botines* can be bought at shoe stores but some prefer to have them custom made which provides more options, such as the quality of the materials and the color. Tonalities of brown, fawn and black are the accepted colors used in *botines* but the range of colors is large. *Botines* in white, pinks, yellows, purples and blues can also be made but they tend to be ordered

by men who do not necessarily intend to wear them with a *charro* suit; wearing *botines* is very common in western and south western states both in Mexico and the United States. The price can range from 300 to 700 pesos (30 to 70 USD).

Boots have been used since the Spanish arrival and have evolved over time. By the nineteen century they seem to have acquired their current aspect and were known as *abotinados* hence the word *botín*, singular for *botines*, (Diego Fernández 229).

***Faja* (girdle)** - Used with the *gran gala* and *etiqueta* variations, the *faja* is a scarf-like piece of cloth that is worn around the waist, and like the tie, serves no practical purpose other than a visual additive. When used with the *gran gala* variation the girdle comes in similar tonalities as the tie, albeit "serious" colors, such as whites, are preferred. When used with the *etiqueta* variation the girdle, and tie, must be white.

The origin of the use of the *faja* is uncertain, but there the is possibility that it evolved from girdles used when lifting heavy items and over time it became used with the more elaborate versions of the suit. Ball players in Mesoamerica used them before the colonization from Europe as well.

Charros

Whom a piece of art is made for is imperative to fully understand it. For the *charro* suit understanding this is also to understand why it became the cultural icon that it is today. *Charro* suits are used by men, known as *charro*s, who perform at equestrian competitions known as *charreadas*, an equivalent to the American rodeo. The official dictionary for the Spanish language gives *charro* the definition of, "…(1627) rider who wears a special suit, conformed of jacket with embroidery, adjusted trousers, white shirt and wide brim hat, and conic crown" (Real Academia Española 137). The word *charro* itself comes from the Basque word *txar*, meaning *weak* or *defective,* and it is the name given to villagers of Salamanca, Spain (Rincon Gallardo 2). *Coarse*, *rustic* or *bad* are also possible translations to *txar* and why *charros* are called as such is not completely clear, but it is possible that what originally could have served as an insult became the name adopted by this group. As noted by Olga Nájera Ramírez in her discourse *Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse, and the Mexican Charro*, *Charro*s represent traditional, rural, catholic and aristocratic values (Nájera Ramírez 8) and seek to preserve them through tradition. Within Mexico the figure of the *charro,* originally a symbol of class and gender stratification of *hacienda*s, became popularized during the mid-1900s by singers/actors such as Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante and Arturo Guízar. Better known as Tito Guízar, Arturo Guízar is considered the first hero and the first true *charro* in Mexican film. In film they presented the *charro* in his village as a singing, gallant lover, heroic and brave defender of the weak who sported an always

well groomed mustache; a figure that continues to be promoted by singers such as Antonio Aguilar, Vicente Fernandez and Pedro Fernandez.

Ironically outside of Mexico *charro*s tend to be known not for who they are, but who they are not; mariachis. Foreigners are familiar with the broad hat wearing, singing mariachi and his guitar that is seen on television or at local Mexican restaurants, and it is because of mariachis that the *charro* suit, and *charro*s themselves, are recognized abroad. Mariachis are string

Figure 11 Mariachi Vargas de Tecatitlán ca. 1960.

ensembles form west-central Mexico who, before and during the early 1900's, traditionally dressed similarly to peasants; in white shirts and lose white pants. Like *charro*s, they too used wide brim hats but instead of boots they used sandals, or *huaraches*. Following the example set by President Miguel Lerdo de Tejada's *Orquestra Típica* (national orchestra) in 1901, mariachis began dressing as *charro*s using the *gala* variation of the attire, although silver was not always used, perhaps to keep the cost of the attire down. Dressing as *charro*s became so popular amongst mariachis that by the 1930's the Mexican government required them to dress as *such*, after which they were declared as the official musical ensemble of Mexico (Nájera Ramírez 7). Women from *charro* families use a version of the *charro* suit, which has similar variations as the men's suit. Instead of trousers uses an A-line skirt, which female mariachi singers adopted as

well. Mariachis are not *charros,* for despite dressing similarly, mariachis do not participate in the *charreada*, a requirement to be considered a *charro*. Mariachis have taken liberties with the suit and one can see mariachis in bright pink and other colors which will be not accepted in a *charro* environment, but changing the suit does not seem to create friction between *charros* and mariachi for they consider themselves different groups; mariachis can be seen singing in *charro* events.

*Charro*s tend to come from wealthy families and belong to the same socio economic group, which creates strong ties between them. They are the families who can afford to spend the thousands of pesos needed to buy the suits, saddles, horses and other implements needed to be a *charro* and, although any man can become a *charro*, the amount of money needed tends to limit it to wealthier sectors of Mexican society, a factor that effectively restricts the growth of the *charreria*, and perhaps its popularity as a sport. *Charro* families tend to have a tradition of being *charros,* and it is common to see *charro*s with their children dressed with the *charro* suit at young ages. Being a *charro* is not very common and is not done by most Mexicans, so what led to a small sector of the population to use such distinctive clothing, and become the iconic image of the entire Mexican society? To understand this evolution one must explore the history behind the suit.

Figure 12 Modern *charro* Wedding

Figure 13 Modern Mariachi

Origins

To understand a piece of art and how it came to be used as a social distinguisher is important to understand the factors within a society that led to the need to create it. For the *charro* attire there were two main factors that influenced its creation. First, the *hacienda* system which, despite its strong organization, had a weakness caused by the sheer size of the *hacienda* itself, making it difficult to oversee: this led to the use of horses by *hacienda* workers known as *peónes* literally "one on foot". And second, a changing society, reflected by the use of horses by workers, throughout the Spanish colony in Mexico that was beginning to change the way the different social groups interacted with, and viewed each other, especially *hacienda* owners (*hacendados*) and their *peónes.* Changes that eventually led to the separation of the *hacendados* and the rest of Mexican society, and to the creation of the *charr*o suit and the *charreada*.

***Haciendas* and Horses**

The origins of the society that led to the creation of the *charro* attire go back as far as the Spanish conquest of Mexico and the creation of Spain's new world colony, *la Nueva España* (The New Spain). In 1521 after the fall of Tenochtitlán, the Spanish conquistadores, aided by their native allies, began to conquer the territories surrounding the Aztec Empire and the Empire itself. As the colony expanded so did the need to administer the tributes coming from the newly conquered lands, for which Hernán Cortés, and latter the viceroy, gave grants, known as *encomiendas* which permitted the Spanish to collect tribute from natives living in a certain area (Russell 31). This system effectively replaced local native leadership with Spaniards, funneled

tribute to the Spanish crown and enriched those in charge of the *encomiendas*, all while keeping the local native social organization as intact as possible. At this time, the importance of clothing can already be seen in the large percentage of the tribute that came in the form of cloths, known as *mantas*, which also served as money in trade. Although the *encomiendas* were effective in obtaining tribute, they failed to provide full ownership of the land to the Spanish overseeing them. This changed in the mid-1600s when some *encomiendas*, and other grazing permits given by the crown, became fixed areas with fixed boundaries under the legal ownership of an individual. These areas, known as *haciendas*, were organized as a central complex of buildings, the *hacienda,* or house, were the *hacendado* oversaw the land and in many instances the funds to construct the *hacienda* buildings, and the machinery used to farm, came from *encomienda*, public office, mining and/or commerce tribute (Russell 80). By the late seventeen-century some *hacienda*s had grown so big and the number of *peónes* required to work in them was so large that *hacendados* forced natives in appropriated land to live in the *haciendas*. In the state of Zacatecas, for example, a land grant given by the Royal Audiencia of Guadalajara in the early 1600s encompassed an area roughly 680 hectares (Tejeda Márquez 50). Some *hacienda*s were so large that separate buildings, known as *estancias*, were placed throughout the *hacienda*'s land for the *peónes* to stay while taking care of the cattle herds, and due to existing regulations the *peónes* had to travel within the hacienda on foot.

Figure 14 *Hacienda* "El Carmen" in the state of Jalisco. Note the arched façade similar to those found in Muslim architecture.

When the Spanish set foot in the new world they brought with them a key component to their victory over the native populations of the Americas, the horse. Horses, an indispensable weapon across Europe and Asia, and the equivalent of our modern tanks, gave the Spanish the mobility and strength necessary to defeat the native Mexicans and, along with superior firepower, permitted the Spanish secure a colony that was to last nearly 300 years. Such was the importance of the horse that the use of the same became restricted to the Spanish and a few of the local chieftains, or *caciques*. The horse thus became a status of symbol denoting class, race and gender stratification (women for the most part did not ride horses), and effectively separated the Spanish from the non-Spanish (Nájera Ramírez 2), or in other words, those in charge from those who not. Since the majority of the *peónes* were of native decent, these regulations effectively forced all of the *hacienda* work to be done on foot. The regulations known as *Las Ordenanzas de la Mesta de la Nueva España* of 1574 decreed, "no *mestizo,* Indian*, molto*, nor free black cannot have nor acquire own horse under any circumstance" (Serrera Contreras 176) appear to restrict only owning a horse rather than riding it. The same rules mention that

ownership was forbidden, but use was (Serrera Contreras 176), however if a person could not own a horse, then most likely they could not ride one, unless it were borrowed or acquired illegally. These laws seem to have been ignored to a certain extent, and by the early seventeen-century, to aid the *hacendado*s oversee the *haciendas*, permits were given to certain *peónes,* especially *mestizos*, those of half-native half-Spanish descent, to ride horses. However in 1633 king Felipe IV asked governors to limit the number of licenses given to ride horses and in 1680, the *Recopilación*, or revision of laws, clarified this by completely prohibiting the use of horses by natives and required authorities to strictly enforce this.

But the licenses were continued to be given and this, along with the widening illegal use of the horse, began to render these laws obsolete. One's place in the *hacienda*, and throughout the colony, was determined by ancestry and economic status. *Hacienda* populations, of up to 1000 workers in some cases (Russell 81), with their feudal-like organization in nature, effectively created the settings and distinctions amongst the members, by keeping the Spanish and their descendants in control of the conquered native populations, and by assigning well defined roles for all the members of the system. In the fields these distinctions were accentuated by the horse for it was easy to distinguish the *hacendado*, the one on the horse, from his *peónes*, the ones on foot. But when both groups began riding horses this distinction began to disappear and the *hacendados* needed something else to replace their now lost distinction. Clothing proved to be the answer, but before this happened, more drastic changes in the colonial society had to occur.

Figure 15 *Hacendado,* left, and *peón,* right. Notice that the *hacendado's* clothing is much more elaborated.

Changing Society

Although the size of the *hacienda* was the factor mainly responsible for the repelling of the *Ordenanzas de Mesta,* which in turn, led to the creation of the *charro* suit, there was more happening in the colony than just the wide spread use of horses. The dissolution of the laws shows a society that was changing or, if one looks closer, falling apart under its own structure: a culture that was struggling to recognize itself.

When the Spanish colony was created in Mexico, the Spanish were not the only newcomers to arrive. African slaves, French, Chinese, Hindu, Pilipino, and Japanese traders also enriched the recently created society, but they also posed a problem to the Spanish. How could the Spanish maintain themselves in control of a society that could potentially absorb them in its diversity? Castes, a concept already known to both the Spanish and the natives, proved to be the solution. They created approximately 16 principal castes that could combine with each other to produce more castes (Diego Fernández 249), and by the seventeen-century the castes became even more defined into nine principal groups. Members of "pure blooded" castes, such as

Spanish, black or *Indian*, had a higher place in the society than those of castes that resulted from the intermarrying of castes, a matter of race over caste. From clothing to ownership of property, castes provided each of their members a place in society and restricted or allowed what they could or could not do. They also restricted who could hold certain offices and perform certain crafts; however, although punishments for breaking these rules could be severe, they were not always imposed.

Clothing used to visually place a person within a caste, or group, was a practice already present before the Spanish arrival. Certain colors, cotton and certain types of fabric, at least nine different types, and the use of feathers and patterns in clothing were reserved for the emperor and nobility. As in Spain, contrast of clothing between commoners, warriors and lords denoted "social position, family origin, material possessions, hierarchy…and the expression of power and authority" (Diego Fernández 218). Knowing who belonged to which caste was critical to keep the colony functioning properly, and, to avoid mistakes, paintings placed in churches depicted the castes (how they should look and dress) and helped priests place newborns within the correct caste when they were baptized, (see figure 14). Despite having been abolished as recently as the 1900s, caste denomination can be seen in baptismal certificates. There are cases in which a newborn was placed under the wrong group, and attempting to change this could involve a civil dispute, providing the child with more opportunities by belonging to a "better" caste. The Spanish recognized nobility of natives, encouraged marriage between noble indigenous women and Spanish men, and permitted them to dress as Spanish, even going as far as granting them licenses to ride horses and carry weapons.

Figure 16 Examples of *casta* paintings. Left, "from Spanish and Indian produces *Mestizo.* Right, "from Spanish and *Albino, Torna Atras*

Having such a varied number of groups meant that the groups were not always clear, and a dissolution of clear differences mean that people could move between castes, thus moving within the society itself. Increased wealth propelled this social mobility and helped change castes from being solely racial factors, but rather into an economic ones. With prosperity came luxury, and clothing was naturally affected when people could afford to dress better, and since "the way of dressing is a manner of speaking" (Diego Fernández 213), the fact that people could dress as they could afford meant that the upper classes, those of "pure" blood, had to change how they dressed if they wanted to continue to be distinguished from others. As early as the 1600s, just over a hundred years since the establishment of the colony, the changes were becoming so noticeable that the Spanish king, Felipe IV, in a letter to the viceroy mentioned the relaxation of

customs in the colony (Viquiera Albán 23). And the church noticed it too, in 1679 the bishop of Michoacán pointed out the,

> "Notable disarray…in the customs, and for the lack of honesty and the lack of distinction with which equally nobles and commoners wear silks and precious cloths and use jewelry of gold and pearls and silver." (Diego Fernández 251).

Clothing was no longer effective to distinguish the castes and this diminished the power of the castes that controlled the colony. The changes were more noticeable in the cities but although the medieval-like organization of the *hacienda*s helped maintain the distinctions between its members stronger than in the cities, the increased social mobility also began to affect them. Workers dressed like the Spanish did, which added to the use of horses, began to "equalize" *hacendados* and *peónes,* at least visually. By the XVII non-Spanish were wearing cotton pants, and shirts, clearly of Spanish origin, as seen in the in the Codex Osuna (see figure 16) and natives of noble origin, and those who through wealth moved in social class, also began using boots and hats like the Spanish did. Of course the money and power remained in the hands of the *hacendado,* but visually they could appear similar. The changes were noticed even more when *mestizos* and other castes members began to hold positions that at one point had belonged to the Spanish. *Mestizos* acquired ranches and farms of their own, as early as the 1600s, and began to grow wealthy (Russell 82). Lineage helped stop complete equality since the Spanish descendants could count on their ancestry to give them an advantage: race over caste. To differentiate not just the *hacendado* from the *peón*, but also the Spanish *hacendado* from the non-Spanish farm owner, the *hacendados* began to incorporate certain aspects into their clothing to make them look different.

Fashion, a concept born in the Renaissance, arrived to Mexico from Europe, trends originating mainly in France, were adopted first by the upper classes. A European background, gave Spanish *hacendado*s easier access to it, while wealth gave it to non-Spanish farm owners and *hacendados*. Two particular aspects from seventeen-century fashion helped the evolution of what was to become the *charro* suit; materials and detail. In an attempt to stay visually different from wealthy farm owners and other social groups *hacendados* incorporated materials such as silk and better quality cotton which contrasted with the agave clothing worn by *peónes,* and the less quality cotton used by less affluent groups. Baroque influence of the period increased the detail, intricacy and use of gold and silver inlays in women's clothing, and this began to transfer to the men's vestment as well. When supervising the fields, this translated mainly to the use of suede patterns (suede was used originally to reinforce cotton pants) over the cotton, but when the occasion demanded, during celebrations for example, silver tread replaced suede, and silk replaced cotton. The more elaborated and the higher the quality the better. This provided *hacendados* with opportunities to, literally, show their wealth and set the basis for the beginning of what was to become the modern *charro* suit. But before it became the suit as it is used today and the symbol of Mexico, the *charro* suit had to undergo one more change that altered it visually, and could have potentially tarnished its reputation.

In 1862, the French under Napoleon III invaded Mexico and, aided by thousands of Mexican fighters who had been defeated by the government of President Benito Juarez during the War of *Reforma,* created an empire through 1867. At its head was placed the archduke of Austria, Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg. Two groups of horsemen participated in this conflict. On the side of the new emperor many *hacendados* (by then known as *charros*) joined the war effort, and, opposing the Emperor, a group of fighters known as *chinancos* joined the deposed

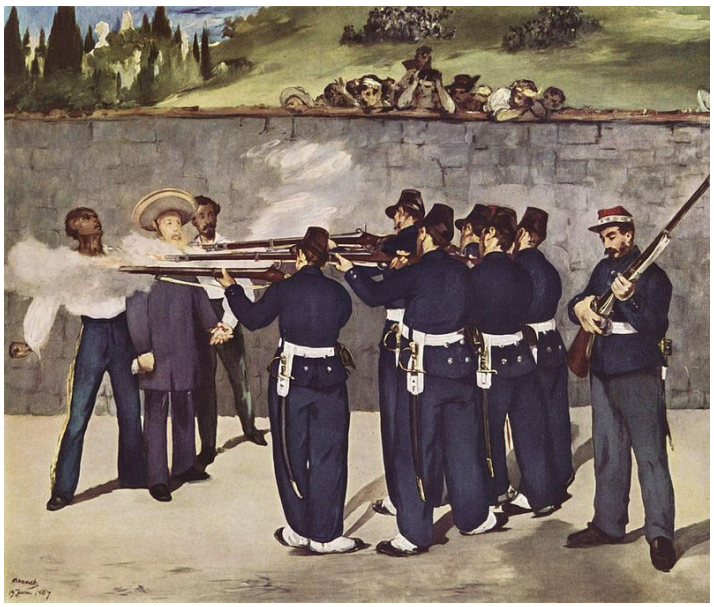
President Juarez in an effort to expel the French from Mexico. *Chinancos* dressed similarly as the *hacendado charros*, albeit not as extravagantly, and came from less affluent backgrounds.

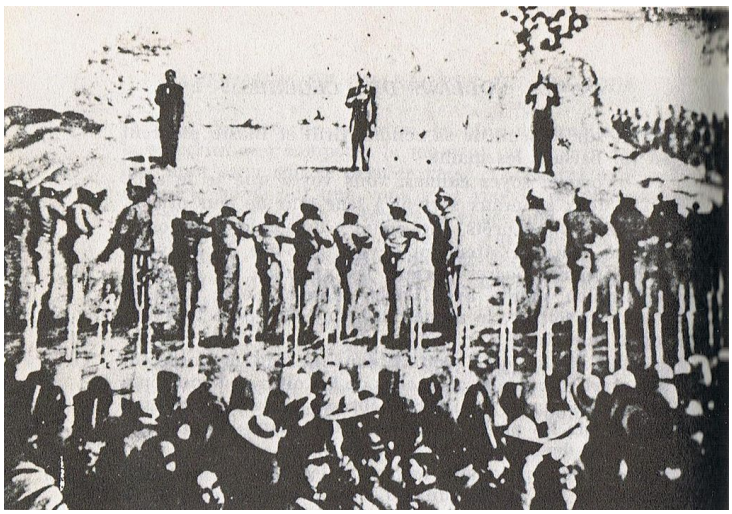
Figure 17 *Chinanco* during the French Intervention.

Maximilian, perhaps in an attempt to empathize himself with his opposition, or perhaps from a genuine appreciation of the suit, began to dress as the *chinancos* and the *hacendados* did. During morning rides the emperor could be seen wearing a *charro* suit and during state ceremonies he would wear a black suit adorned with gold and silver. It is widely believed that Maximilian changed the cut of the pants from a lose one to an English one; much tighter fitting but broad on the base, and ideal for horse riding. The *charros* began adopting the Emperor's modifications and continue to use them till today. Thus the *hacendado charros* influenced the *chinancos,* who influenced the Emperor, and who in turn, influenced the *charros*. The use of

black suits in formal gatherings seems to be another addition by Emperor Maximilian and when the empire collapsed he was executed on May 15, 1867 wearing a black *charro* hat and pants (William 78) (see figure 15). These events could have potentially destroyed the image of the *charro* in the eyes of those who opposed the French, which were the majority of Mexicans, but somehow *charros* managed to evade this and continued to be a strong socioeconomic sector of Mexican society.

Figure 18 Top, Monet's Execution of Maximilian depicts the Emperor wearing a *sombrero* and *charro* suit. Bottom, actual photograph of the execution were Maximillian, on the right, is not wearing a *sombrero.*





Charreada

Art losses is efficacy if it is not seen by the public, thus, in addition to understanding what it is, how it came to be, and who uses it, it is important to know where it is displayed, why is it displayed there and who is meant to view it. The *charro* suit, before the mid-nineteen century was seldom seen outside the *haciendas,* and was mostly seen by *hacendados* and *peónes*. During this period, and especially after the French Intervention, the *charro* suit began to attract attention outside the *hacienda* environment, and, in an interesting change of status, *charros* were propelled into the national setting as sportsmen in competitions known as *charreadas*: competitions which replaced bull fights as the sport of the upper classes.

Bull fighting had for most of the colony been the preferred sport and, it served as a visual representation of the colony itself. Bull fights served to finance cities and towns, and during such events the arrangement of the seating was organized by social, economic and political status (Nájera Ramírez 45). As noted by Viquiera, bullfights then served to present in front of the people [of a town or city] the established order in the colony, in a visual and understandable way (Nájera Ramírez 35). Fights and discord aroused when spectators felt that they were allocated in seating unworthy of their rank and social status. It is likely that *hacendados* were also spectators of these events, but perhaps they could not have possible imagined that their descendants were to occupy the place of the bullfighters in a sport of their own. Bull fights had a weakness however, that after the War of Independence diminished their political function, and turned them into a

mere spectacle rather than a social reminder of status; they were of Spanish origin. Anti-Spanish resentment and the fact that they were a visual reminder of Spanish social division diminished the popularity of the bullfights, nearly eliminating them by the 1800's.

At the same time, in *hacienda*s, the techniques needed to handle cattle came to be organized into competitions were *hacendados* were given the opportunity to show off their skills and, in a sense, to prove their manhood (Nájera Ramírez 3). These competitions also became social gatherings where *hacendados* could socialize with one another, and inevitably the *charro* suit followed the *hacendado* into the competitions and helped them display, not just their skills, but also their wealth. The competitions were held around town festivals or during family celebrations, but they remained confined for the most part to the *haciendas*, particularly in the state of Hidalgo.

Figure 19 *Charro* performing *suerte* during a *charreada.*

During the French intervention many *charros* who opposed the regime were forced into the cities, especially Guadalajara and Mexico City. In Mexico City a group known as *La Sociedad de los Hombres Libres,* The Society of the Free Men, was created to organize competitions in an attempt to preserve the traditions of the *hacienda* which could easily be lost in a city environment. Nine different *suertes*, or skills, used to work with cattle were defined, and the competitions became more formal. *Hacendados* descendants began defining codes and rules that furthermore structured the competitions (Nájera Ramírez 6). It is important to note, that one of such these determines that in case of a tie, the team that displays the best *charro* suits will be the winner, which shows the importance of the suit in the *charreada*. *Charreadas* helped not only preserve *hacienda* values and serve as a representation of life in the *hacienda*, but also as a place where the rural aristocracy could be seen by the urban wealthy (Nájera Ramírez 3). It is possible that Emperor Maximilian might have seen, or heard about the competitions and perhaps here is where he saw the *charro* suit for the first time. Arenas known as *lienzos charros* were created to mimic the *hacienda* corrals were the competitions originally took place, and the Catholic Church, who previously also participated in the bullfights, which were also organized around religious festivities, began to help organize *charreadas* as well. Even today, *charreadas* tend to take place around Saints' festivities, and it is not uncommon to have masses in a *lienzo,* on horseback, before a major *charreada*. A curious example of the church and its relation with the *charro* occurs in the city of Tlaltenango, Zacatecas, were the first Sunday of every month, dozens of *charro*s, the priest included, and other men on horseback, pilgrimage to a nearby shrine and have mass there. It is quite a sight to see a bishop remove his *charro* hat and put, over his *charro* suit, a chasuble to celebrate mass.

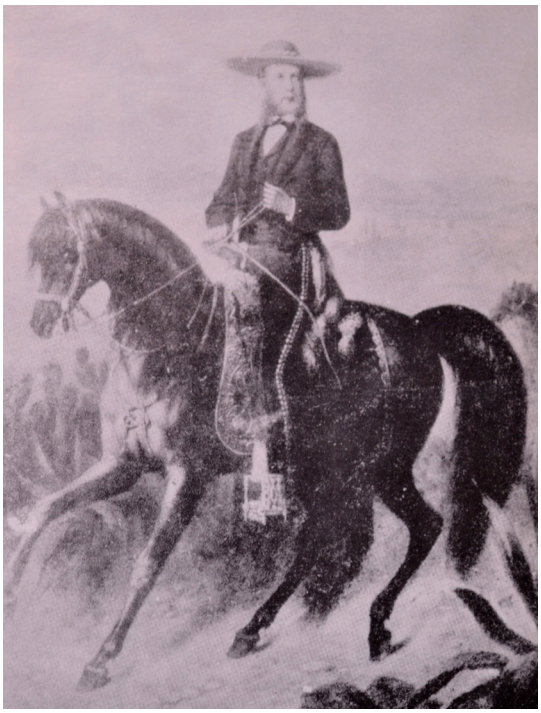
During the Revolution of 1910 laws known as *Ley Agraria* virtually made *hacienda*s disappear as the land was divided and distributed, mainly to peasants and former *peónes*. *Charreadas* became even more important to preserve a dying way of life and, ironically, this attack on *hacienda*s was the key to making *charreadas* a national sport. To gather the different *charro* teams into one organization and to further ensure the survival of the *charro* way of life the *Asociación Nacional de Charros* was created on June 24th, 1921, and was consolidated on December 16th, 1933 as an official sport regulated under the *Federación Nacional de Charros* (known today as the *Federación Mexicana de Charrería)* (Nájera Ramírez 6). And whether because of genuine popularity, Mexican origin, or upper class influence the *charreria* became the official sport of Mexico, and September 14, the day before Mexican independence celebrations which occur from September 15 to 16, was set as the national day of the *charro*.

Figure 20 A-Left, litograph of *charro* during the french intervention. B-Right, *charros* late 1800's.

The *charreada* in a sense came to replace bullfight as the sport of the upper classes (Nájera Ramírez 33) and from the revolution, and up to today, the *hacienda* was replaced by the *lienzo charro* as the "gallery" were the *charro* suit continues to be displayed. The *charreada*

succeeded in becoming the time, and place where stratification occurs visually. Bullfighting failed because *charreadas* are Mexican and bull fighting is not. Seating in *charreadas,* as in bull fights, although not required to be, continues to show stratification of Mexican society, with *charro* families usually seating in the lower, front places.

*Charro*s, despite their upper class status, had become symbols of Mexico. Even as far back as 1861, when the mounted police, or gendarmerie, known as *Cuerpo de Policía Rural*, or *Rurales*, was commissioned by President Benito Juarez, they were asked to dress as *charros* despite the fact that many *charros* supported the invading French; a fact romanticized in Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's 1866 novel, *El Zarco*. Things from one's own country are "better" than those from a foreign one even if they are the same, and the fact that *charreadas* are Mexican facilitated their adoption as a national sport and helped hide the fact that they represented the wealth and power the Mexican revolution sought to eliminate.



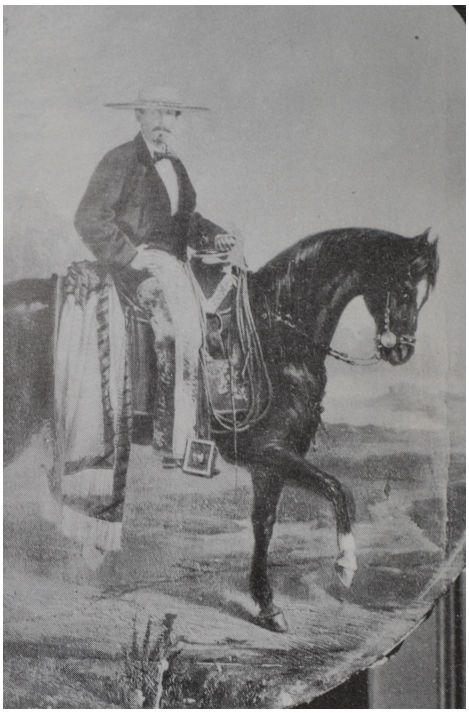


Figure 21 Left, Emperor Maximilian ca. 1862. Right, *charro* ca. 1900.

Grecas

Besides understanding the history of the suit, we must analyze it visualy. This takes us to the most intricate aspect of the *charro* suit. This is a series of patterns known as *grecas* which adorn large sections of the attire, and tend to be consistent in most *charro* suits and even in saddles. *Greca*s, despite being used extensively, and despite the fact that they give the suit one of its most distinguishable aspects, seemed to be little understood by many of the *charros* who use them. Even the artists who make the suits could not give a definite answer as to the meaning of the patterns they produced. At first this was puzzling but as one of the craftsmen pointed out, "we have to work to eat, let's let others find the meaning." As it turns out, the meaning of the *greca*s and their creation has two major influences. First, producers of the suits incorporated indigenous designs, and second, the European influence provided with further subjects to be incorporated with the patterns of native origin.

Pre-colonial designs

Fretted Patterns

*Greca*s can be divided into organic and geometric designs, with geometric patterns used far more extensively than organic designs, which could be due to the fact that they are easier to replicate over, and over again. Virtually all of the geometric patterns can be found in pre-colonial architecture, in nearly all indigenous cultures. For example in the complex of Mitla, in the state of Oaxaca, the Mixtecs created fret wall decorations around 900 dc. (Kubler 174-175) on which

the patterns found in the *charro* suit can be seen. And Mitla is not unique, examples of *greca* can be found thought the country, on pottery from Nayarit and in the background and shields of the Mexica warriors in *The Rout of La Noche Triste* in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* Codex. If the patterns can be found in most civilizations of Mexico it seems highly unlikely that they were developed in isolation by all of the indigenous groups, but rather that they came from the same origin. The Olmec civilization is considered to be the first great civilization in Mesoamerica, and its influence can be seen in most major cultures of the region, thus, it is likely that the *greca*s originated in the Olmec culture. It is important to note that at least one of the patterns (spiral) can also be found in Greek architecture, created at a time of isolation between Mesoamerica and Greece.

Figure 22. Detail of *greca* on jacket

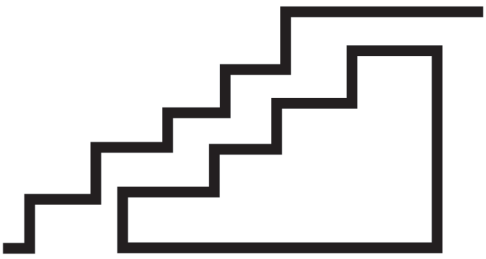
These patterns found their way to the *charro* suit through the women that produced them. During the colony there seems to have been a stigma in men producing textiles, thus this job was done mainly by indigenous women. Prior to the colony however, the creation of patterns was done by *Tlacuilos*, painter or scribe in Nahuátl, which were associated with the ruling class, and were organized into teams responsible for painting pictographs, ideographs, or phonetic symbols; most *greca* in the *charro* attire belongs to the first group. These pictographs can even be found in ritual capes worn by priests as they appear in codex Magliabechiano (fol. 5 v. and 6r), which

further strengthen the idea that the patterns were used to distinguish members of society even prior to the colony and the reason of why the Mitla complex was reserved to upper classes.

When *hacendado*s asked tailors to add patterns to the *charro* suits, in the Baroque style, it is possible that these women incorporated those patterns they were most familiar with, and they also incorporated Spanish motifs to their own clothing, such as lions and horses. Whether this was done as a silent protest against the Spanish or a mere unconscious act, the *hacendado*s began to display the designs their *peón*es' ancestors had created. The relationship of the patterns to the indigenous past was so strong that the Catholic Church had forbidden the use of the same, and this tells us that the patterns had strong connotations that, at least to the Church, posed a threat to Spanish authority. Nowadays artists recycle these patterns and create their own, but the meaning of the patterns has nearly been lost today, and it is possible that by the time they were incorporated into the suits, they were already little known; tailors continued sewing and preserved designs albeit lost their meaning. There are several which still can be found in the *charro* suit;

Stepped Pyramid

This *greca* represents the steps, or stairways, of the pyramid, and the pyramid itself. A continuously recurring motif (Solis 220) it is repeated to form the edges of the *greca* and can be found in codices and in pre-colonial architecture. Seen in ritual capes it also stood for "parapet" when placed over circles; one can see *Tlaloc*, the god of rain, standing on one in the Codex *Ixtlilxóchitl* (fol. 110 v.).

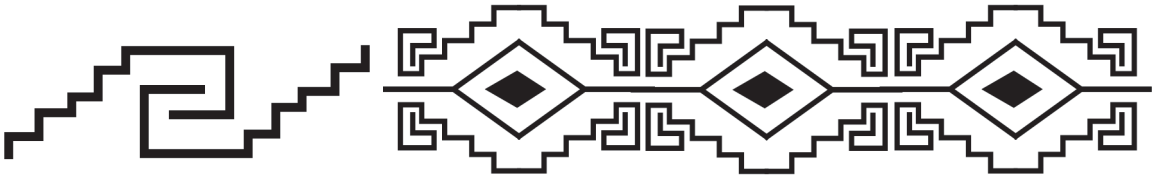


Spiral

Perhaps the most iconic of all the patterns, this spiral represents the God *Quetzalcóatl* who traditionally is depicted as a snake. In shields known as *quetzalxicalcoliuhquichimalli,* on codices and in ritual capes worn by priests the spiral can be seen (Longhena 93). These shields decorated with feathers and cotton fabric used by caciques and lords, served as tribute taken to *Tenochtitlán*, and after the conquest as tribute to the Spanish; some examples survive in Mexico City's Museum of Anthropology. Also used to represent fire when combined with the glyph for water, the spiral stood for war, and the name of the city of *Chicomoztoc*. It seems that even before the colony this design was restricted to be used by certain groups. Without knowing, the *hacendado*s were displaying a symbol of indigenous rule and the symbol of the God who they had helped replaced with their own God. (Note: the variation shown here can also be found in Greek architecture).

Combined

Here we can see combination of the step and spiral motifs into more complicated patterns. This is the norm when designing *greca* for many motifs and patterns are combined to form the designs.



Blade

The negative space in this design is reminiscent of the obsidian blades used by natives before the Spanish arrival. They were used in war, daily life and to perform ritual sacrifices. This design is seen only rarely in *charro* suits.

Homes?

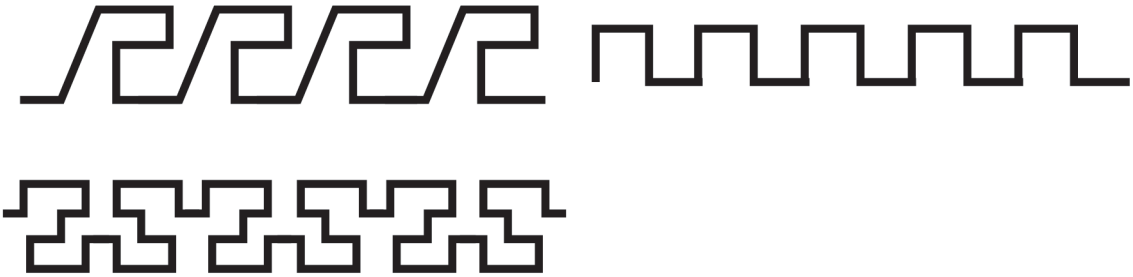
It seems that this pattern is a repetition of the glyph for house. Known as Kal (kal [li]) (Solis 297), this symbol also represented hospitality and can be found in codices and architecture.

Striped Designs

Found in woman's skits, known as *hupiles*, patterns such as this are commonly found in the *charro* suit. Pottery from the proto classic period (300BC – AD300) from the state of Nayarit can be seen displaying this motif (Kubler 175), and to the Mayans it was a representation of snakes, and it is possible that this symbol also represents mountains or water.

Variations

The meaning of some pattern variations has proven difficult to find. "In the genealogical manuscripts…designs often designate towns or temples," (Kubler 175) which gives the possibility that they represented geographical locations. They also could be variations of the designs we already saw, particularly the first, which is very similar to the motif for *Quetzalcóatl,* and the third, which is reminiscent of a pyramid.



Other Indigenous Motifs

Flower

This design can usually be found in the decorations of hats, but also in church windows. The Roselle flower, or one of the hibiscus flowers, is the most likely candidate as the flower

represented here. Brought originally from Africa around the 1600's, in Mexico this flower is used to make a beverage known *agua de Jamaica* and similar flowers can also be found in Mexico. A glyph can be found in several native cultures as a flower with four rather than five petals which to the Mayans stood for *b'ih*, or "road", and forms part of the word for the name of the milky way, which was sometimes referred as the black road and which was believed lead to *Xibalba*, the place of the dead. The phrase *ochb'ih* means that someone has died (Kubler 175). To the people in central Mexico it also stood for the four cardinal points, the four stations of the year and the four previous epochs, the fifth representing the return of the God *Quetzalcóatl* . The flower also appears in the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who also serves as the patron saint of *charro*s.

Golden Eagle

The eagle represents the *Aquila Chrysaetos*, or golden eagle. Eagles represented the Aztec culture and it was believed that an eagle eating a snake, snake representing the Mayan God *Quetzalcóatl*, served as the marker for the location were *Tenochtitlán* (now Mexico City) was to be founded. One of the highest ranks in Aztec military used the eagle as their symbol and in an interesting coincidence it also served to represent the Roman legions. Spain being part of the Roman Empire must have seen the eagle as a symbol of power too, and this made it an ideal motif not just to them, but perhaps as reminder to the natives as to who was in charge. It was a natural symbol that had similar meanings for both the Spanish and the native Mexicans and it became Mexico's coat of arms, although other four nations also use eagles in theirs.

Corn

Corn is a crop native to Mesoamerica whose cultivation stated around 3500 BC (Diamond 142), served as the chief crop in Mexico when the Spanish arrived and continues to be a key element in Mexican food, particularly in tortillas. To the natives, corn was a sacred crop

given by the gods, and a crop key in the development of the great civilizations of Mexico. Its importance could have been the reason the native tailors incorporated it into the *charro* suit.

Plants

Some of the plants found in *greca* are very similar to those found in codices decorations. This stylistic approach could have influenced the stylization of plant life into the *charro* suit.

Figure 23 Detail of codex page.

Colonial Designs

Rococo and Arabic Designs

At the time of the creation of the *charro* suit the influence of Rococo art's intricate patterns affected dressing, particularly of women, this in turn may have affected the desire of hacendados to add patterns into their suits. Arabic calligraphy and art could also have been a factor influencing the *charro* suit, for Spain had been for centuries under Muslim rule and it is known that the *charro* saddle is a mixture of Spanish and Arabic saddles making Arabic influence probable (Rincon Gallardo 3).

Cross

Needles to say the cross was one of the most important, if not the most, of the symbols the Spanish could have incorporated. The cross represented the authority of the Church, thus of God, and that of the king whom god granted the crown. The symbol of the new religion found its way into the *charro* suit, where it is surrounded by pagan symbols, some of which the church tried to abolish.

Horse and Horseshoes

Horse and horseshoe motifs are constantly seen in *greca*, which is understandable since the horse is as vital to the *charro* as the suit itself. Horses aided the conquest of Mexico and served as symbols of power and status during the colony, and even to this day owning and riding horses is seen as a symbol of status and chivalry. Horseshoes can be seen alone, surrounding crosses or in pairs making hearts and chain like patterns.

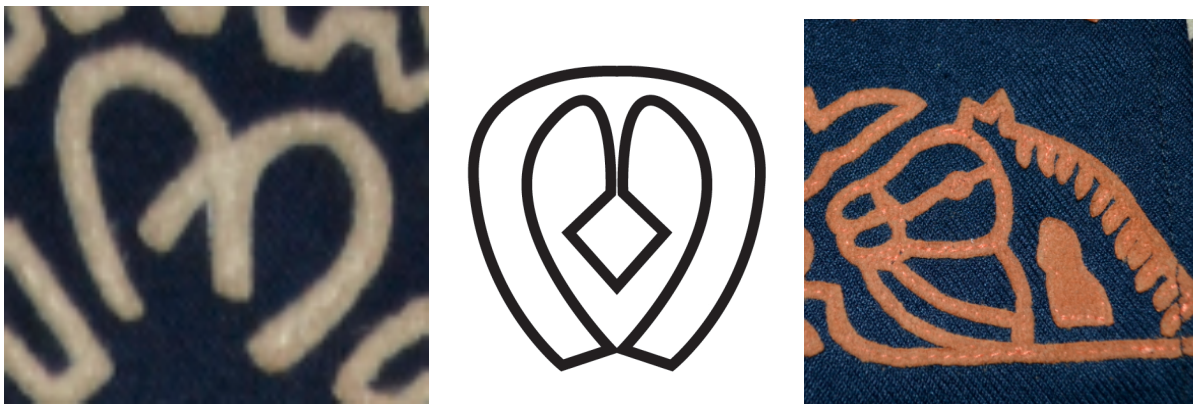


Figure 24 Details of *greca* with horse and horseshoe motifs.

Wheat

Wheat was brought to the new world through Europe and quickly became a dominant crop since it was favored by the Spanish over corn, a native crop. "Wheat replaced corn as agriculture shifted from Indian to Spanish control" (Russell 81) and because natives served as workers they were mainly responsible for its production. Corn continued to be grown for

indigenous consumption and over time ascended once more as the preferred crop in Mexico over wheat, although both crops continued to be grown in Mexico. Wheat was another symbol of Spanish control and naturally found its way into the *charro* suit.

Figure 25 Detail of belt with wheat motiff.

Production

Producing *charro* suits involves several craftsmen and can be a lengthy and complicated process. The different parts of the suit are produced in different locations and, although several of them can be purchased readymade, it is preferable that they are custom made. Producing part of the attire is done usually by families like the Ramírez Araujo family who has produced suits since the end of the eighteen-century, and who demonstrated how the trousers, vest and jacket are produced. They also have produced suits for Mexican singer Antonio Aguilar, known as The *Charro* of Mexico (Mexico's *Charro*), amongst others.

During the Spanish colony in Mexico, women served as tailors, a craft seen unfit for men, and began learning the craft as young as the age of fourteen. Men began to work as tailors with the introduction of the mechanical sewing methods and were given protection by laws that permitted them to freely practice this craft (Diego Fernández 254); the fact that mechanical technology was involved changed the office from a woman's to a man's one. Boot and hat making was practiced by Spanish immigrants and over time natives began to learn the craft although it was forbidden to blacks how to learn to make them. Other techniques such as *entorchado*, string covered in silk or metal string, used mainly by the military, were also adopted in Mexico. *Vaqueta* (cow leather) was processed in *hacienda*s and in fact hides were a major product in them since the late sixteen-century (Russell 83). Leather and suede can now be bought in cities like Guadalajara. Cotton was grown in Mexico and dyed using local and European

method for example, dark red and yellow for garments was obtained by mixing burnt incense with ink and insects, such as the *cochinilla*, providing lighter reds. Today producing suits involves traditional methods working in conjunction with new technologies such as electric sewing machines, and with the exception of the shirts, which are for the most part bought already made. The following are the steps to produce a *charro* suit:

Belts

Manufacturing a belt is perhaps the most difficult and time consuming of all the different sections of the *charro* suit. A process that can take months, it involves an impressive amount of work, most of which goes to the *greca*. The tools, as seen in figure 26, are still very traditional, with the exception of the electric sewing machines, which can cost up to 12,000 pesos (1200 USD). Although recent economic problems have reduced the demand for this type of belt, simpler designs without the *greca* continue to be produced in large numbers. Here are the steps:

1. First, two strips of leather, one thicker than the other, approximately 60cm in length and 7cm wide, are rounded to a tip on one of the edges and six holes are punctured were the buckle can be buckled. The two layers will serve as the inner and other layers of the belt. Figure 27.
2. A mold is used to shape the buckle and to provide a way of buckling the belt. These molds are bough already made and, along with saving time, when producing the buckle they also provide it support. Figure 34.
3. A design is chosen and using a sharp tip, embedded into a piece of leather which when wet, can transfer the design over and over again into the belt. Figure 28. The piece is wetted and pressed upside down into the belt to transfer a “watermark” which saves transferring time and provides a reusable mold.

4. When creating geometric *greca*, the design is created using a tip and compass (figure 29), after which the area around the pattern is embedded into the leather, (figure 28). The design itself becomes embossed.
5. Using pita, a fibrous string-like material extracted from plants such as agave, (figure 33), the embossed area is sewn over (figure 30) creating a relief over the surface of the leather (pita gives its name to this particular type of belt which is known as *piteado*). The strands of pita are very short which forces the craftsman to tie strands together in order to cover the entire belt, which can take months. The knots are visible in the back of the belt, (figure 32).
6. When the pita *greca* is complete, the two strips of leather are sown together at the edges, which covers the pita knots. The buckle, also covered in pita *greca*, is attached to them by making a loop in the end of the belt.
7. Finally a keeper made from a strip of leather is inserted around the belt

Boots

Although making boots is a much faster process than producing a belt, taking only a few days to complete, it too requires several steps which can take years to master; these are those steps:

1. First, strips of a fabric like-material known as *cinta de oreja* are cut in lengths of approximately 12cm. These serve as bootstraps, known as *orejas*, from where the wearer can grab, to put the boots on, (figure 35).
2. After choosing a standard shoe size, an aluminum mold is used to cut a shape into a leather sheet known as *oscaria* (figures 36-37). These aluminum molds are bought in the city of León Guanajuato, a renowned center of shoe production, and the same mold is then used to make a shape from a canvass-like material, (figure

38). Two pieces of each material are needed to make one boot; the leather becomes the outside and the canvas the inside (as seen in figure 39).

3. The two sections of leather are sewn together with nylon string to make a shape like a butterfly, figure 40, and the same is done to the canvas. This creates the sides of the boots. The side of the boot that faces the outside is reinforced by gluing a rectangular piece of elastic fabric, 7-8cm long, that permits the boot to expand to permit the wearer to put it or remove it; they can be bought in Guadalajara. This elastic remains in the side of the leather that will not be visible and the side that is visible is cut into stripes, which are then reinforced by sewing over them (figures 42-43).
4. The leather and canvas sections then are placed together, canvas facing out, and the bootstrap is sewn into both sections at the center, which becomes the front of the boot (figures 44-45). The two sections then are sewn on the opposite side from the bootstrap after which the second bootstrap is attached. This leaves the boot with the inside out, which is then turned over to leave the leather on the outside and the canvas on the inside.
5. The inside sole is created by using another mold to cut a shape into thick leather sheet, known as *vaqueta* (figure 46). This sole is placed on a wooden mold, figure 47, which also supports the leather and canvas already sewn, and provides a mold where the sole can be attached to them. This leaves this sole inside of the boot.
6. A *casquillo* (reinforcing piece on the front of boot) made from a mesh material known as *celeste*, and a *contrafuerte* (reinforcing piece on the back of boot) made of vaqueta, are added to reinforce the inside of the boot (figures 48-49). The

contrafuerte is beveled to blend with boot's inside and to avoid leaving a bump on the inside of the boot.

7. A second sole made of thick rubber known as *neolite* is glued over the inside sole which reinforces the first sole, and covers any trace of the gluing of the same and of the leather-canvas, (figure 50). *Neolite* can be bought in 70cm square sheets in Guadalajara. Then, four smaller pieces of *vaqueta* are rounded and nailed to the back section of the sole, then sanded down until an even heel is created (figures 51-52). This is then painted in black to blend with the outside sole, and shoe inserts can be added for extra comfort.

Moños

Ties tend to be bought rather than be custom made and producing them is a relatively easy process if we compare it with the rest of the suit. They consist of four pieces; a cloth strip, a woven string ring, and two *huesitos* to attach it to the shirt.

1. A strip 60 cm long and about 12 cm wide, is cut from cloth then folded in half, length wise, and sewn at the sides (figure 53).
2. If the cloth were broken into six sections, the first and fifth sections are tied together (figures 54-55) to make the back section of the tie. The tie is then flipped over and tied in the center, which also ties over the knot that united the back section together (figure 56).
3. A ring made of woven string is inserted from the edges to cover the knots and to serve as an adornment (figure 57).
4. Through this ring a piece of string is then inserted from were two huesitos are attached (figure 58).

5. Lastly the back flaps are secured to the font ones with string to keep the butterfly shape and to stop the tie from opening up, figures 59-60.

Suit (trousers, vest and jacket)

The same process applies to creating a vest jacket or trousers; all together they can take one to two weeks to manufacture.

1. Being custom made, measurements need to be taken from several parts of the body (shoulders, arms, wrists, legs, ankles, etc.). Sections are cut according to the measurements in cloth, or in suede for a *cachiruleado* suit (figure 62).
2. A pattern is chosen, either made for the customer, or, more typically, chosen from a selection of designs (figure 63) and then transferred into paper. The pattern can be drawn smaller then, using a printer, expanded and duplicated, saving time. Figure 64
3. The paper with the pattern, the cloth sections (or suede when *cachiruleado*), and suede strips are sown together following the designs in the paper. This transfers the design to the suede layer that is to become the *greca*. Figure 68.
4. Using scissors the suede is cut around the sewing to remove material that is not part of the pattern. This reveals the pattern itself (figure 66). The paper with the drawn pattern in the back is removed and over it, another layer of cloth is sewn, hiding any leftover paper stuck on the sewn string.
5. Once all the parts have *grecas* on them, they are sewn together to make the finished garments and after which buttons are added on the jacket and vest (figure 70) and, in the case of the pants, the zipper is sown (figure 69).

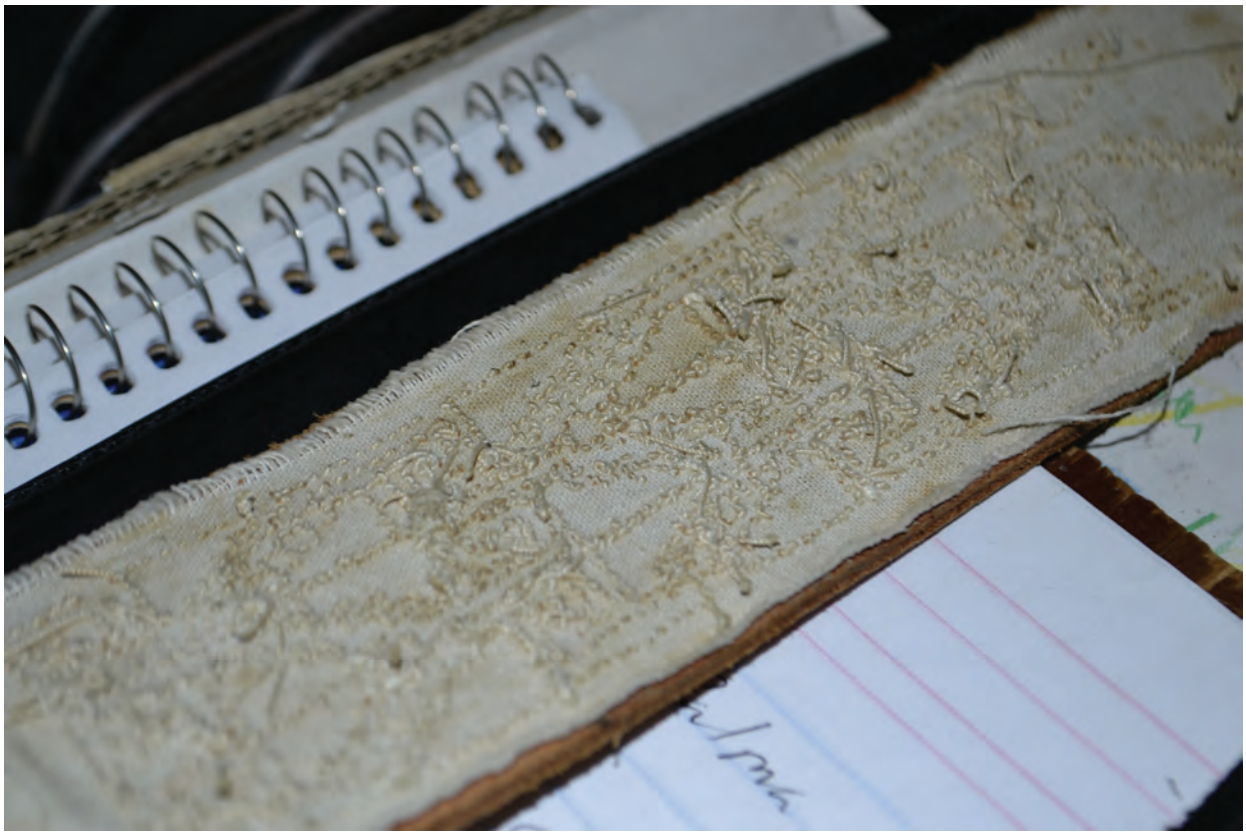
Production Images: Belts

Figure 26

Figures 27 - 28

Figures 29 - 30

Figures 31 - 32



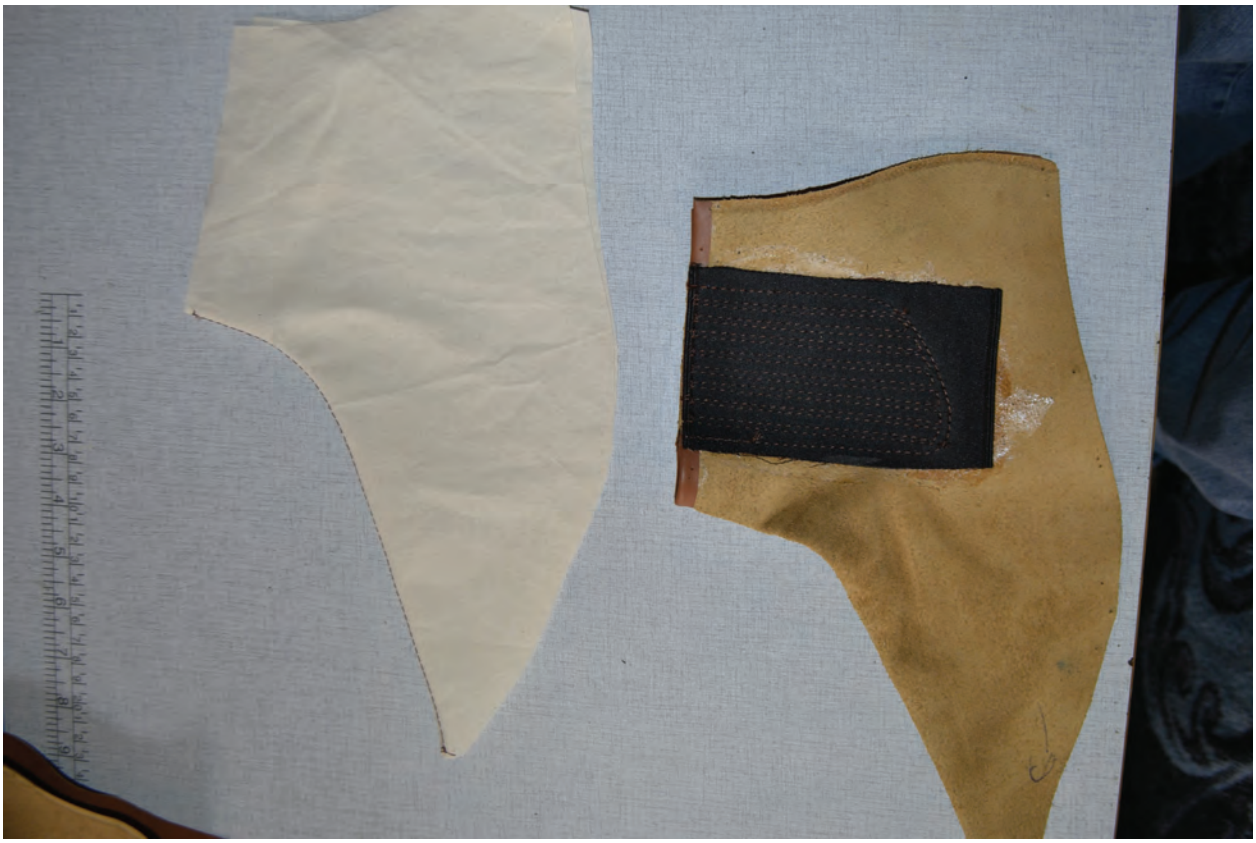
Figures 33 - 34

Production Images: Boots

Figure 35

Figures 36 - 37

Figures 38 - 39



Figures 40 - 41

Figures 42- 43

Figures 44 - 45

Figures 46 - 47

Figures 48 - 49

Figures 50 - 51

Figure 52

Production Images: Moños

Figure 53

Figures 54 - 55

Figures 56 - 57

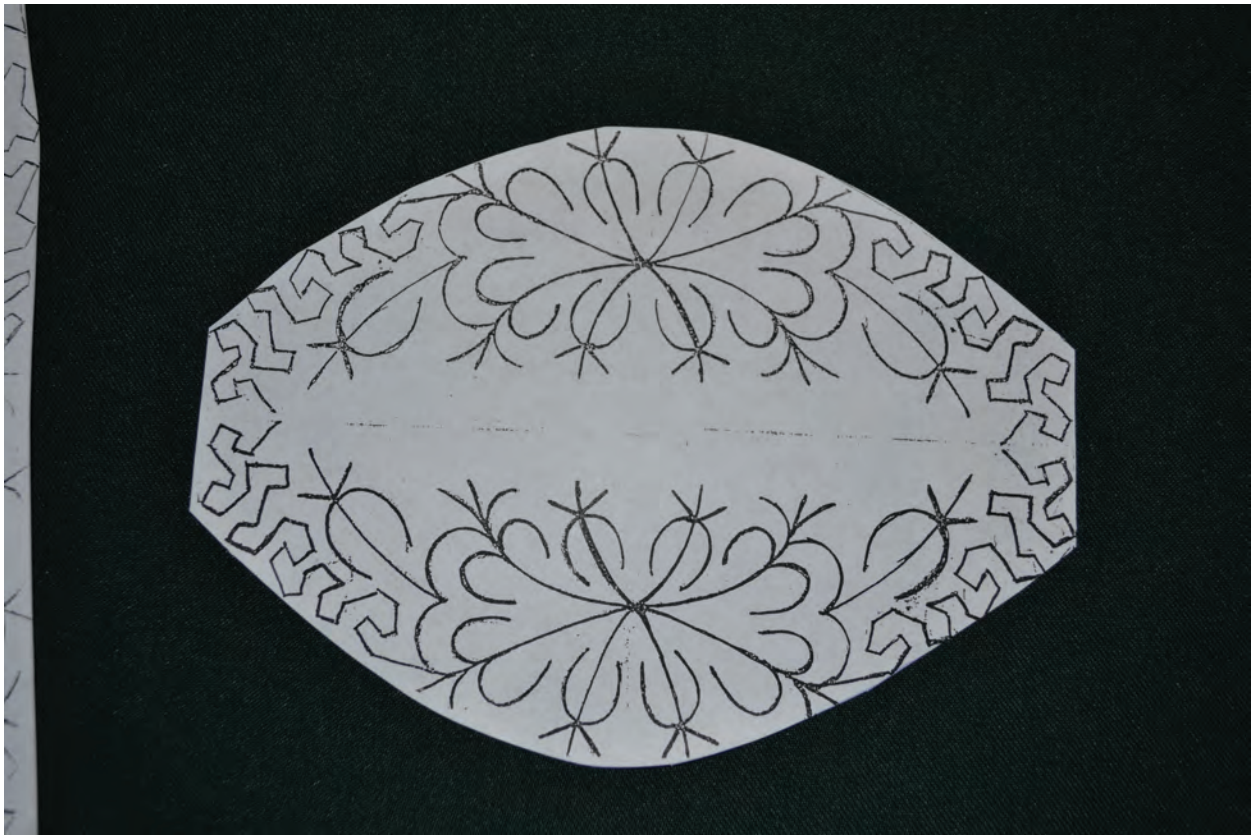
Figures 58 - 59

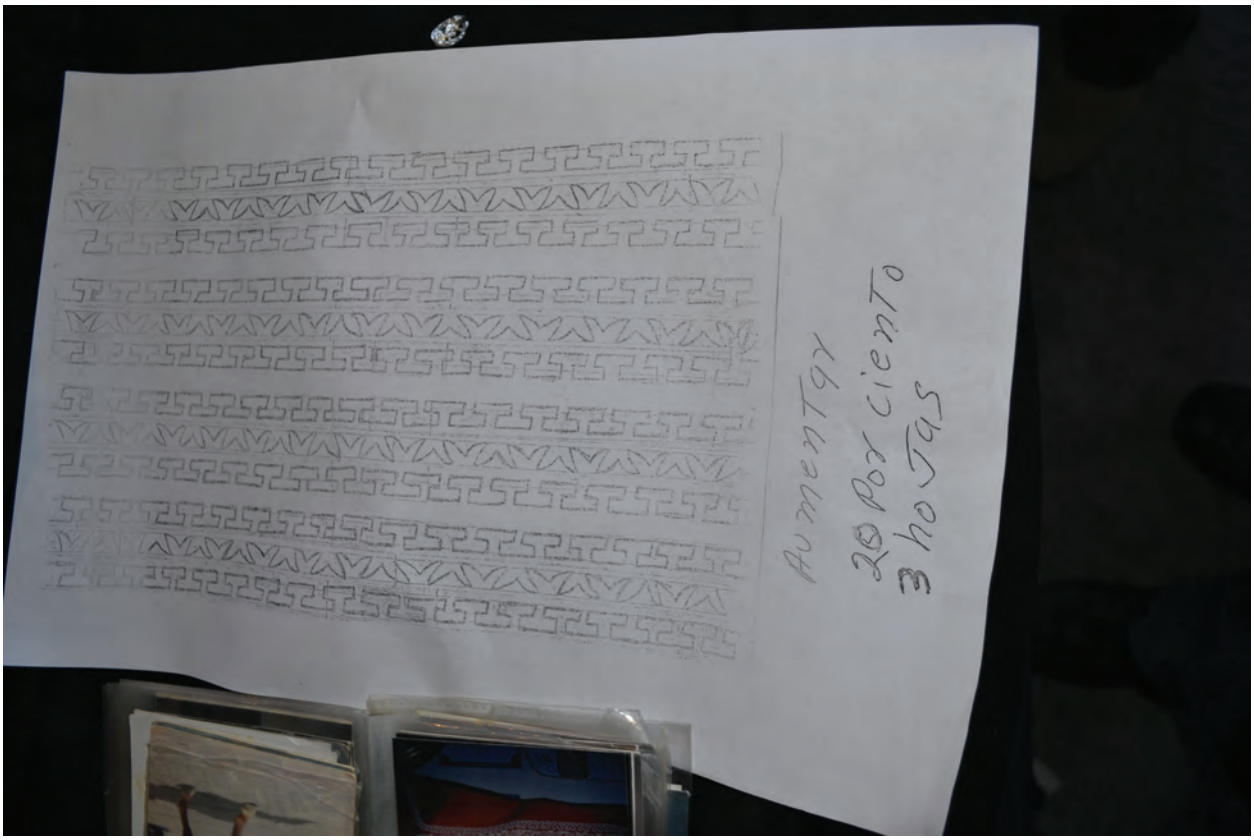
Figures 60 - 61

Production Images: Suit (trousers, vest and jacket)

Figure 62

Figures 63 - 64





Figures 65 - 66

Figures 67 - 68

Figures 69 - 70

Conclusion

By analyzing the *charro* suit as a work of art a, new perspective has been given to such an iconic manner of dressing. The attempt to visually divide Mexican society, in fact united it far more that the *hacendados* and the *peones* could have imagined possible. For the *charros* who use this work of art, this new information brings them a step closer to not just living our tradition but also understanding it. Understanding is what truly keeps a tradition alive.

Glossary

Cachiruleado or Cachirol Suit that is made by using suede patterns over suede, rather than suede patterns over cloth.

Casquillo Reinforcing piece on the front of a boot, made from a mesh material known as celeste.

Celeste Mesh material used to reinforce boots.

Chapetas Small adornments at the base of the hat's crown.

Charro Man who performs at equestrian competitions known as *charreadas*, an equivalent to the American cowboy.

Chinancos Group of fighters who opposed Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg in the late 1800s.

Cinta de Oreja strips of a fabric-like material used to manufacture bootstraps

Contrafuerte Reinforcing piece on the back of boot, made from a mesh material known as *celeste*.

Copa Hat crown.

Entorchado Cotton string covered in silk or metal string used in *galoneado*.

Faja A girdle used by *charros.*

Galoneada Hat adorned in gold or silver tread wrapped in silk string.

Greca Fretted patterns.

Grequeada Suit with suede designs and leather buttons in the front.

Hacendado *Hacienda* owner.

Hacienda Large plantation commonly found in colonial Mexico in the 1600s and 1700s.

Huesito Football-shaped button made of horn, bone or rolled suede.

Manillas Leather gloves.

Mariachis String ensembles form west-central Mexico.

Moño *Charro* tie.

Neolite Thick rubber used in boot soles.

Oscaria Leather sheet used to make soles.

Pedradas Indentations in a hat's crown which serves as protection.

Peónes *Hacienda* workers, literally "one on foot".

Pita Fibrous material made of plants like agave, and which is used to adorn *charro* belts.

Piteado Belt decorated with *pita*.

Suede Soft leather used to create *greca.*

Tradition A set of practices that seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition.

Vaqueta Cow or goat leather.

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